



Cover - Untitled
Hazel Wechsler
Pen and paint

Edboard Poem

Age-old wisdom states that the sagacity of group-thought often surpasses by great marks the cognitive power of the individual. Tabling for submissions this year we decided to put that theory to the test—proving conventional wisdom absolutely right. The following is a transcription of a document to which passersby were invited to add one word (sometimes not even that), resulting in the collective chaos that is this year’s poem from us to you.

Rabbit jumps over the hill and hides from outside foxes under the log. Then, thunder rumbled, nearby all of the cats spoke in tongues. In denial, species of dinosaurs bark towards water to awake the wombats who cried “HELP!” Before they fell down a well, tsunamis felt something smile. The doctor helped her lover dash toward the woods angrily. The trees stood like gods, swaying towards a moon glistening in the darkness like ghouls. Animals dangle from trees huge vines supercallifragilisticexpialidociously. Therefore, she was with very small black book that was combusting suddenly. “dog, boomers, boobs, and feet make gay.” Energised, they are happy because amazing stories are fun when boys are cool! Stories make compelling points for creating the coffee shop band that jams music on liberatory fudge. My pet T-rex eats herbs because I love to go ferociously. Up hill and down low the platypus finds Life Spirit and impermiab[e] [sic] excitement. Within me isopodes, zoomer and spontaneous aliens rave. Abductions, freedom, and conspiracies about Flat Earth death-cults rapid population growth define antidisestablishmentarianism. “Hello” turtles that dream, today purple interests rates plunge toward plumage. Rabbit homicides, the leading cause of pineapple coffee booklicker. Inevitably, some hedgehogs found guns for clout. Fuck... *moan* glycerin this. When arbitrary boundaries conserve obsequious men, free shavakado [sic]! Mesnerizing [sic] dogs desperately sprinting away from the devil, Sans Undertale. Finally sick, the doctors, women from Siberia,

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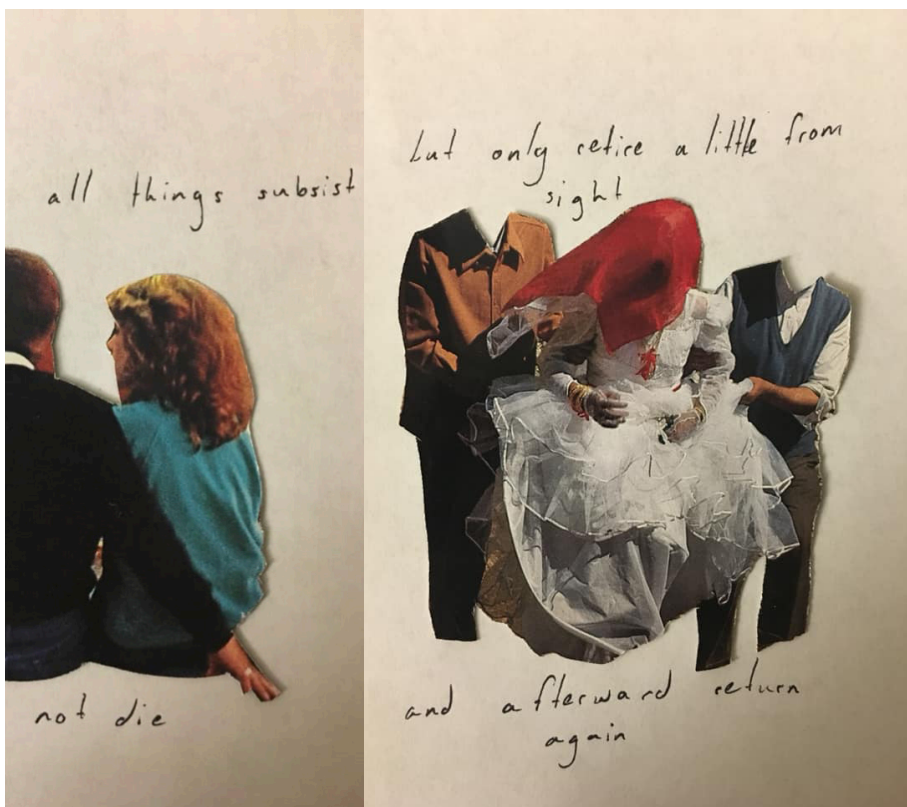


world

that



and so



Triptych
Mattie
Collage

Waiting for the Snow

Among the fires
and fallen trees,
dying embers
sear our palms.

As others flee,
we cling to what was lost;
wearing fig leaves
shielding that which we used to share—
beds / bodies / bondage.

Severed we stand
outside the gates of Eden;
with compasses wayward,
we face wild beasts and wilderness.

Now, separately we stray,
until autumn leaves
and snowflakes fall
to bury our old gods
underfoot.

Mother Knows

Our mother of green and blue
Aches as its womb is massacred
Once full of fruit
Beautiful, sweet, innocent

We throw, we kick, we hit
The trees are plucked
From the tender earth
The soil so sodden and vulnerable
Now, empty

We continue

We live
We laugh
We die

We pile

Heaps and heaps

And underneath
The seemingly indestructible
Vast blue tides
Riled and desecrated

We continue

Smoke rises
Burning mercilessly
The lush greenery
Abode to faultless creatures
Incinerated, to an ashy crisp

We continue

Our mother, steadfast
Quivering

A booming voice echoes
The clouds rain down
Overflowing
Innocence is drowned
We continue, no longer.

I Accidentally Cloned Myself in the Science Center and I was Initially Worried but the Benefits Seem to Outweigh the Weirdness

I accidentally cloned myself in the science center last week. It had been a pretty weird Tuesday already. Before lunch I learned Juicemonger (my cat) has green eyes, not blue; the coffee maker worked alright even though it was unplugged; and my boyfriend Alden ate an entire burrito without noticing that I had been using it to store six or seven raw carrots. (It keeps them fresh.) It was the kind of day when there is too much free energy. And the laws of matter and conservation aren't working right. Peculiar peculiar.

Accidentally cloning yourself feels tingly and electric. Also soft, like a prism bending light into color. At first, I thought I was looking at a reflection, like that scene in the second Garfield movie where Gramfeld and Grendel mimic each others' movements for fifty-two minutes before Gramfeld finally consumes his double and ends the movie. The first thing my doppelganger and I said to each other was, "Woah, radical!" Which is not a thing I normally say.

"So, um," we said in unison.

"How do you think—Why would—Shoot."

We both pondered whether it would be a good idea to try and replicate the experiment, so we tried, but continually produced nothing but weird-feeling knock-off green-blue playdough.

"Which one of us is the clone?" we both said, trying to sort the handfuls of blue-green putty. We looked at each other. "We have got to stop speaking in unison."

"Splorch," they said.

"Haha. Quee-Queg," I said.

"Okay, now we're getting somewhere," they said.

"Obviously the first thing on the agenda is to recreate that spiderman joke."

"Haha, because there's two of us. This is a good idea," they said.

There are obviously defects to having two people very suddenly where there was only one before. We only had one bicycle, one bed, and one vuvuzela, things which are difficult to share. Whichever one of us was the double didn't necessarily have a social security number, pay tuition, or legally exist. We didn't really care about that.

Lunch was interesting. Alys said she didn't know I had an identical twin sister, and I said I didn't, and yes yes I cloned myself on accident and no no I don't know how to do it again.

"June, here's an idea!" said Laura, a science major. "You could clone other stuff like batteries or food. That could really help people."

My twin put some blue-green polymer clay on her nose.

"Tried that," I said. "You're welcome to fiddle around with the machinery," my doppelganger said, putting more putty on Laura's nose. "If it works again, this mess could be a very big-huge-fun-time for science."

“Yeah, cause it breaks every conceivable law of conservation,” said Deshawn, also a science major. I put some putty on his shoulder.

“I have so much putty,” I said.

The next day a lot of people used the putty machine and none of them could duplicate anything except different colors of strangely-textured knock-off playdough. Everyone got a different color. Chloe got Violet. Hazel got Smaragdine. Madison got Corpse Flower Purple.

That night, Juicemonger was very confused because he got twice the attention he usually gets. Alden, my extended family, and French chemist Antoine Lavoisier were also confused when I explained the situation.

Next Tuesday, Claire came up with a big ball of fuschia polymer clay and asked me what it was like to live with a clone of myself. “Hey, June? What’s it like to live with a clone of yourself? Also, may I pet Juicemonger?”

“Yes, you may,” I said. “It’s quite nice, but we are out of eggs.”

Juicemonger meowed a high vibrato C sharp, and a bird hit the window. Wilson came in.

“So, it’s fun then?” Claire said.

“Yes. Only because I like myself. I wouldn’t recommend it if you don’t have a good relationship with yourself already. Also, other June is a boy now, for simplicity.”

Wilson sat down on the floor and Juicemonger jumped on top of his head. “What are the best and worst things about it?” Wilson said, petting Juicemonger.

“You can play tennis against yourself.”

Wilson pursed his lips. “Is that a good thing or a bad thing?”

I obtained Juicemonger from Wilson’s head and deposited him on Claire’s. “Well, I’d be the first person ever to win tennis against myself, but the emotional toll would be monumental. So both, I guess.”

We sat and talked for quite a while.

Good science is esoteric, and time cooks us all in different ways. There’s no end product—just the random shuffling of matter again and again and again and again. On orders of magnitude too big to think about. Big big big big.

I accidentally cloned myself in the science center, and that night we put two white flowers in different bowls and let the food coloring change each of them slowly, slowly, slowly. Because you can’t end a story couched in the shuffling silk of abstraction: we’ll leave you with the image of us holding hands in the woods and hooting and hollering and hooting into the spring wind with the air just warm enough to be sweetly happy. And all that night and the next and next, the flowers on the window blossomed different colors even though they were the same to begin with.



God Help Appalachia
Con
Woodcut

Wisdom Concerning Archery

With the bow in my hands and an arrow nocked,
You crept up behind me and planted vile seeds.
“Girls always shoot too high,” you said without hesitation.
You watched as I squirmed and lowered my weapon.

If your words were true, was I destined to miss?
Was it implanted in my genes to never make a bullseye?
Or was this just your way of keeping me in place,
To make sure my bow was an accessory, not a weapon?
To make sure I bowed before you, inferior, instead
Of rising above what you had already become?
Why would you restrain my firecracker soul,
My wide eyes, and wild dreams that let my arrow fly?

I turned to you, with a sickly sweet smile,
My bow raised to the target, a weapon once more.
The arrow flew straight into the ground.

Dear Grandfather,
I will never shoot too high.
Even if I miss sometimes,
I will find the bullseye.

Molting

Before you left, you placed a cage of Goldfinches
on the hood of my car and kissed my cheek.
You turned your back. You walked away.

When I took them home,
brown feathers poured into every available space
but never flew from me. I stroked their backs and
spoke softly to them and for this, they stayed.

I let them free in my apartment, gave them
food, water, so much attention I often thought of nothing else.
Inevitably and unsurprisingly, I clung too tightly to life
and after two months they died.

The American Goldfinch occurs in our state in large numbers during winter,
but it is the new year now, and I have not seen any others.
This, of course, does not mean that they are not present.
It is the new year now, and I have not seen you, either.

I wonder if you left the Goldfinches for me because you thought
I would take care of them far better than you ever could.
I know this: You do not cling to life at all. You know it too.

But if anything stays, it will suffocate in my hands.
In yours, you will let it fly away.

I still have a bag of birdseed in my garage.
I still wear the bracelet you gave me on my right wrist.

The American Goldfinch sheds its feathers twice a year.
This is something we have in common:
I too must re-learn how to love myself, knowing you cannot.

I wonder if instead, you left the Goldfinches for me because you thought
they would be a comfort. I am becoming a new creature without you.

If I had kept them alive, they would have become
new creatures as well:
things yellow and shining, like sunlight.

Anonymous



Untitled
Hazel Wechsler
Pen and paint

Wolf's-bane

The custom of dogs:
 the stilling of the tendons
 the shaky hind legs
 the break between the ideal and the
physical
 (as subtle an atrophy as can be)
is perhaps the closest I can get to describing
the paralysis of being alone
 in public.

When I am out and about
I'm a lone wolf
striking and alert, without a pack
to run with, to stray from, to holler at
and press next to me
like a trusty cross-body.

My hairs stand on end
and hulking along beside me
are towering flowers of wolf's-bane,
purple-hooded/threatening:
they are men
who may attack or lurk,
cast eyes or avoid them
or reach out
or ask for money
or ask for directions
ask for a number, then a reason
why I won't give it to them,
an answer I do have
but don't/can't say

or they need nothing, do nothing
just are
it doesn't matter
because I am already entrapped
ensnared
barred
by the lack of kin, who
would neither strengthen
my weakness nor contain
my prowess
but teeth-grin assure
I am not defenseless
and that the poison of talk
and taunt could not
strip my throat
of howling

If only I were a deer
in graze beside a highway, knelt
and poised, able runner of the woods
or a rabbit, even
something of one, puff-tailed
shaky
and cute
twitching my nose toward eyes
beyond the glass of a pet parlor
a stranger's stroke only
an inconvenience

To be caught near the lilac scent of a hoodie
and rough chin
 dry amethyst eggplant sangria
flowing from the cream of his eye—
 to be a bunny
 or a deer
and not fear
the purple curse of cuts
from a throat spiked
too tight
to conceal

Dust, Bourbon, and Broken Bones

Tales from Three Months at The Church Studio in Tulsa

(Excerpt)

Preface

Prior to making rock-and-roll history, The Church Studio was simply that: a church. The building itself was built in the Pearl District of Tulsa, Oklahoma as Grace Methodist Episcopal Church in 1915 and survived the infamous race riots in 1921, when many buildings around the city were set ablaze and burned to the ground. In the 1950's a stone façade was added to the exterior of the building, transforming what once was a brick church to the more regal aesthetic of a medieval castle.

By 1972, however, after lying dormant for nearly a decade, singer-songwriter and co-record label owner, Leon Russell purchased the property. The first thing Russell did after unlocking the doors and walking through the space was to tear out all of the pews with an axe. Or, at least that's how drummer Jamie Oldaker describes the initial stages of the building's renovation from a church to a rock-and-roll mecca. It wasn't long before Leon turned the space into the home-base for his record label, Shelter Records, and a fully operational studio, attracting such artists as Eric Clapton, Tom Petty, George Harrison, and Kansas. In 1987, Russell sold the studio which eventually changed owners several times. It lay dormant for nearly a decade with a Tulsa lawyer named Randy Miller in 2010.

Introduction

I met Matt Schenck after a long, sweaty workday of idly simmering in a steaming, stuffy metal shack squatting at the entrance to the parking lot of the world-famous music venue, Electric Factory. My job was to charge drivers for the privilege of parking their car in the same lot, hiding in the looming shadow of the monstrous, old brick building nestled deep in the heart of Philadelphia. It was the summer of 2008, and George W. Bush was still President. I was hoping my roots would take to the new soil of the big city following my self-administered transplant operation, surgically removing them from the lush, rolling hills of West Virginia. I can recall the year precisely because it was the year I proudly voted for the first time for future President and mold-breaker, Barack Obama's first term. I wasn't quite eighteen during the previous election, which meant I was forced to wait four years until I secured my right to vote.

I hadn't yet learned the Philadelphia transit system, so I walked the two-and-a-half miles home after work. As I got home, I crashed through the back gate separating the alley from my yard, and that's when I heard, "Hey, Stripes. Come meet my friend, Matt." It was my lovely neighbor, Julia. She and Matt were old friends and visiting in her backyard, operating a few beers in the raging—yet futile—war against the heat. She noticed my stumbling return home through our shared chain link and extended a friendly invitation to join ranks and forge on into the battlefield. The campaign against the heat would wind up

to be fruitless, but hey—at least we'd have a few beers as we went down swinging. "Yeah, sure," I responded. "I'll be right over. I need to hop in the shower first." I quickly threw myself in and out of some lukewarm water and flung some clothes on. With my hair still damp and feeling as if I'd cleared about a pound of sweat from my skin, I headed to Julia's.

Do you know the kinds of random happenings that wind up altering the course of your life? Well, this was one of those meetings. Neither of us knew it then, but Matt and I had just started a friendship that would take us on a wild ride. Many miles traveled, hours worked in tandem, drinks had, and bones broken. Well, one bone was broken. But we'll get to that later.

At the time, I was a struggling musician, and Matt was a professional engineer and producer. I mean, the dude was so professional, he had his own card. A *card* for Christ's sake! There was an old-timey microphone on it and everything. It was a match made in the only place a match like this *could* be made. Proudly put together on the grimy streets of Port Richmond, Philadelphia.

Matt would eventually solidify our working relationship about a week later when I got a call asking if I could sit-in on a last-minute session. The gig was a pop-singer and her producer, Rumi. The wannabe pop star's career would fade before it shined brightly in the night sky of celebrity and glamour. However, this session was the knot that linked the musical and personal lives of Matt and me.

I trusted Matt as a friend and as a mentor, so I didn't hesitate to accept his offer of coming with him to work in and rehab the renowned Church Studio in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He had just returned to Philadelphia following a journey to and from the Church aiding fellow producer/engineer Michael Block, relocate his operation. There wasn't any *real* plan other than going and putting in work at the shrine of rock-and-roll. The decision to bring the two of us together in Tulsa would wreak havoc on the city and our health. It's the reason I had the opportunity to play Rick James' old drum kit and sing into the microphone Aretha Franklin used to record *Respect*. It's the reason I have a clicking in my jaw. It's the reason I'm writing this book. It very well could be the reason that Matt and I are still such good friends. It's astonishing to think that spending three months in a dusty, middle-America, seemingly innocuous city would have a such an impact on how I would live the rest of my life. Yet, this is the case.

The Pearl

There once was a girl
that loved to twirl
in dresses poofy and wide.
It was always the case,
she had a smile on her face,
& she rarely ever cried.

Then one day,
as she practiced ballet,
she was approached by a very strange man.
Though the girl remained,
her masters, untrained,
and from the room they ran.

She was rather frightened,
her face visibly whitened.
His face was twisted, his eyes were dark,
and his teeth were pointed like a shark.
He said, "Come little girl, I'll give you a pearl:
it will change your life forever!"

Though she suspected he lied,
her misgivings were denied
when she reached to take from his hand.
But the man was impatient
and full of frustration
"Quickly!" was his demand.

Much to her chagrin,
when the pearl touched her skin,
it began to expand.
"It's going to burst!"
She loudly cursed,
However it was too late,
The pearl exploded,
The man, he gloated!
And the girl? All that was left of her was sand.

The Plight of the Dandelion

They call them weeds
Their yellow smiles bringing displeasure
So they get pulled out
Thrown away

Few ever reach their true potential
The ability to shed their vibrant warning signs
Grow wings and softly take flight
The wind as their guide
The world at their fingertips
Knighted, protectors of the wishes of children
Carrying whispered words into the world
Waiting to land and be nurtured by mother earth
It's such a shame
So many wishes thrown away
Before they blossom
Such is the plight of the dandelion

Cary Hardwick



Untitled
Daniel de la Rosa
Photography



Homebody

Jordan Keller

Collage



Do Something

Who is yesterday, and why is he doing so well? Doesn't he see today and tomorrow? They're struggling, they need help.

I mean, look at how sick tomorrow is! He has a rising fever, too hot. Too hot. Burning. Hopefully he can get better. Will yesterday help him? No?

Today isn't much better. Today doesn't have a whole lot, since yesterday is still being greedy. But he has a chance to help tomorrow out before it's too late.

Before it's too late?

It's too late. Too late, far too late.

Tomorrow isn't gonna make it. Today is too weak to help. You should have done something, yesterday.

Zach Bradley



fence focus

Alana Harrelson

Photograph

Lies

Eat the whole thing
And cry myself into a pool of regret
My reflection has never been my friend
There's an empty hole that must be filled
But I keep mistaking the sadness for hunger
Ironically, I am starving
For connection
To breathe air that isn't filled with disdain
To wear a dress that isn't sewn of self hatred
A zipper too tight
A heart too broken
Sipping white wine and slipping diet pills
Deleting search histories
Lately I've been crying when I look in the mirror
I try to edit away the imperfections
But end up editing myself out in the process
I dream of dancing in moonlight that does not reflect my deepest insecurities
Baptize me in acceptance and love

edoh/Defeated/Hope

I am defeated
And I refuse to believe that
The world can change
I believe that
Greed and Envy
Are more essential in this world than
Kindness and Humility
I'll tell you now that
In the future
We will be on our own
It is foolish to presume that
Future generations will survive
It will be evident that
It is too late to fix our mistakes
No longer will it be said that
We stand united
I know that
It's over
And I'll never be convinced that
Hope is still out there

Now change your perspective.

Angela Nelson



**Hiding Your
Smile**
Alys Parker
Graphite



Mad
Alys Parker
Graphite

A Short Story About What Happened After The Higgs Boson Entered a Lower Energy State

The End

Caleb Huppert



Remembering the Gnome Home

Lydia Middlesworth

Photograph

Summer of Despair

The ripe lemons, limes, and persimmons that grew from various trees, back there, by the shimmering lake depict what it means to live in the summer and what it means to fall. The fruits fell from the trees, and he fell into despair.

He accidentally squashed the persimmon with his barefoot as he went chasing the squirrel. There he went fumbling and slipping over squashed fruit. He also went fumbling and slipping over his stuttering, finding the right words to say is never easy.

“I—I hate you and I hate my—self for... what I did to you.”

My body feels a fiery sharpness and is flushed with lament. That is what lying does. I can not keep it buried within the confines of my soul. She knows what happened, I know what happened. It’s eating me alive, burning a fever I can’t sweat out.

I see her looking at me with sadness and anger. I loved her but what she did to me, what she did to my mind, can never be forgiven or forgotten.

First, she made me lie about it, then she made me act upon it. In hindsight, she didn’t make me do anything. It was her twisted machinations that lured me into dark hallows and led me into a life of oddities. I am so weak and vain, and knew the only gratification I would receive would be from her exhaust and her sighs.

At dusk, we went picking the persimmons from the trees. The luminescence from the atmosphere resembled the hues of the fruit; the sun with a burst of gold melding into orange. The fruit was tender to the touch, the juices flowing down my fingers, I saw blood running down hers.

She told me it didn’t hurt, that I keep doing it, that I hold her tightly. I see her sighing, opening her mouth, letting out gasps of air, her eyes going back. I feel so good in this moment. Adrenaline pumps through my veins, my heart beats. Beats. Beats. Beats so hard. And my brain feels a burst of ecstasy. This is what she told me it would feel like; I didn’t want to believe her because I loved her too much and couldn’t stand the thought of her acting upon self destruction. She wanted it so bad, and God knows I wanted it more.

Grab me, put your hands around my neck, kiss me softly, and end it all. This is infinite.

I take the cutting edge and slide it over her wrists. She wanted this. Crimson dripping down my shirt, on her body, it was everywhere, it filled my peripheral with a lucid fluidity of life. Now she is infinite.

That summer, the love of my life, led me to despair. She sweetened my ear with lies of pain, she told me she was absorbing oxygen not worth breathing, that she wanted out. I told her I would do anything for her.

Every crevice of my body burns with disgust, as I stutter these words over the pale and lifeless body:

“I—I hate you and I hate my—self for... what I did to you.”

Tenoch A.

The Church Grim

One evening as I wandered down the street,
I stopped to walk the churchyard of Hanging Hill.
I shivered, snow crunching underneath my feet.
A single howl pierced the air, I kept still.
Out of the mist, the ghostly wolf appeared,
A nocturnal phantom protecting souls.
Through the fading names on mossy stone it veered.
It turned to the church; eyes bright like burning coals.
I tried to follow, keeping my distance,
but this was not an evil hound of hell.
The chipped bricks of the church were no hindrance.
It vanished in its walls, shadowing the bell.
It chimed the brass to signify a death,
and it was I who took a final breath.



I Can Almost See You Sitting There

Mattie

Digital Manipulation

Urinals: A Sincere Farce in 3 Acts

Content note: queerphobic slurs, references to suicide

Act I: The Boston Symphony Orchestra

I think about urinals a lot.

Actually, I don't think I think about urinals a lot,
But I think I think about urinals a lot more than the average person,
Who I don't think thinks about urinals at all.

Instead, I think they just take a piss;
They make what would be called a conscious effort if it were not automatic
To push things out of themselves shortly after they come in
With as little fuss as possible.

I am glad that I am not an average person,
Even if it means that as I wait for a master class with the Boston Symphony Orchestra,
I am thinking about urinals instead of the fact there's a missing space before the open paren
on my name-tag
Which normally would be hilarious.

Instead, I'm thinking about the story I told earlier on this trip:

One of the few times I've ever been at a stadium,
I went to the bathroom and saw twelve urinals in a row,
With ten in a row having shit in them.

I remember wondering if one man did that
Or if he had accomplices;
He must have done it himself,
Because everyone feels lonely in bathrooms.

It's part of the reason I like them,
In bathrooms, I like feeling alone,
Even though when I feel the same way
Outside those doors I want to die.

So I usually sit down to pee if I can,
Even though I usually can't because
Time keeps pissing forwards,
And becoming unsanitary once it sits.

People ask if this is because I'm trans,
But it's not, at least I think so,

But thoughts have been known to be wrong,
Unlike bodily functions which—

Shit.

Anyway, about the ten urinals in a row:

I wonder what pissed that guy off;
I know he was a guy, because even though I am not a guy and I can use urinals,
Only a man would be that shitty.

I am holding for laughs like I hold in my pee,
Because public restrooms only remind me how much I miss them.

Act II: In Which The Author Relieves Themselves

Urine, urine, you drive me mad, it's true,
I'm half urine, all for the love of you.

Act III: Letters

You see graffiti in most restrooms,
But you can only fit so much on a urinal.
You could write "R. Mutt" if you want,
But you might have to make it first, And debate its artistic merit,
Or you could just write some shit on it.

I used to think the three most hateful letters I would see were
"F-A-G," not "K-Y-S."

I used to think the scariest hate came fomented,
But casual cruelty is even worse
The heated blood is interred
In frozen veins.

It takes a moment, even for the worst among us, to call someone a fag,
Because it's a word, and it has a history,
But by saying "KYS" we've already committed to
Pushing out our hate more smoothly.
You need to sit down to call someone a fag,
But you can write "KYS" on a urinal.

An acronym distances us from what we just said;
Even though "fag" is short for "faggot" which means a bundle of sticks,
It still hits harder and more bluntly than its namesake.
"KYS" is a surgical cut delivered strategically to people like me,
Not people they'd call those but people who've tried to stop peeing.

Stop breathing, stop crying,
Stop waking up with a reminder of what's wrong
Below your waist.
Stop wasting time with food and drink,
Stop click-clacking on a keyboard built for two
But the other half is either gone or was never there or both.

Stop worrying every time you unbuckle your belt,
Just trying to get the urine out of you,
But instead you hold it in because
It's easier to drown in toilet water than admit you clogged it,
It's easier to pretend to be happy than admit you don't want to be happy,
It's easier to write a poem and claim you're processing it than to admit you threw up your
guts on to paper.

It's easier to use a urinal.

There are Goblins in the Clock Tower Above the Public Library on Haywood Street

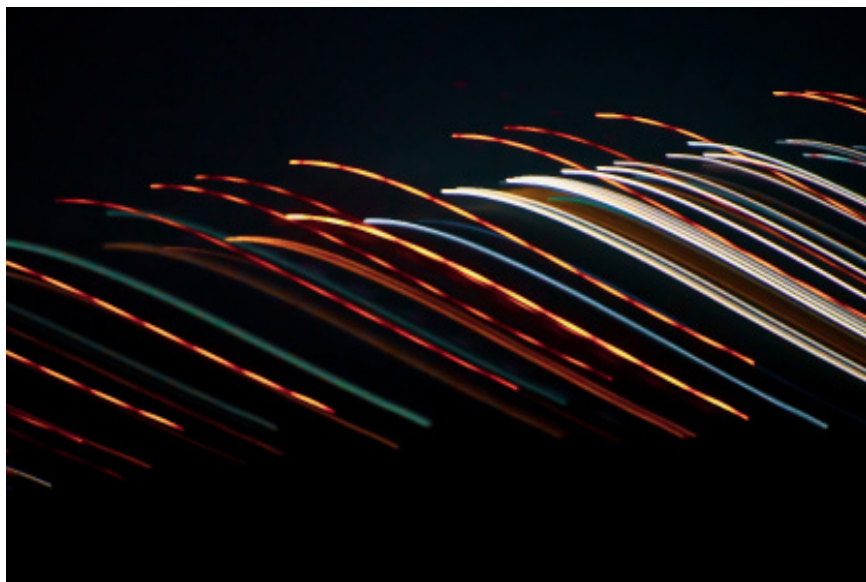
There are Goblins about,
closer than before
skulking in the blade-sharp shadow of the too fancy second hand,
frozen in the quarter-minute mark,
clutching movie ticket stubs and subpoenaed legal
documents, avoiding the probing eyes of pedestrians
from fast below.
The goblins are faithful embodied tick tick stuckness
they are clockwork wardens of sticky pistons
and maple syrup.
They are unguarded wishes.
They are not automatons, or bedtime stories, or a metaphor for the trans experience.
There are many things goblins aren't. They are not:
the wind-howling sleet that couldn't melt. They are not
repulsive, faded grey, scrambled speech,
TV static. They don't imagine
being born again, but different. They don't wear helmets.
And no, they are not a metaphor.
(Trust me)
They are also:
not a secret.
They don't have a plan.
They can't juggle.
They barely speak French.
There are some things we just don't know.
What we can tell you
is that there are three things
that goblins might be:
They could potentially be
the ghosts of wandering eyes or
the soft iridescent spectres of the future which tickle across your vision
when you're paying half attention,
They probably aren't
a rogue wish or a desperate thought or a drowned plea for an altered form,
And third:
They are almost certainly without a doubt
living in the Clock Tower
Above the Public Library
on Haywood Street.

Harper Reese

Post-Traumatic Passion

My mind is tearing me in two
The fire in my veins pulling you against my body
The memories screaming their way around my mind.
I can't breathe
And I can't tell if it's a panic attack
Or the shivers you send through my body
I want to
I want you
But I keep seeing him

Tara Hall



electric lines

Alana Harrelson

Photograph

The Watcher

A note to the reader: all events as recorded in this narrative have been repeated in their truest state, with as much integrity as the author could manage. The author maintains that this event did happen, and has not been embellished or fabricated in any way, and has only been adapted into narrative form for the pleasure and utmost comprehension for the benefit of you, dear reader. The author would like to note that Milner 104, the women's restroom on the second floor of Dana, the basement of Mary Hobbs, and the sub-basement in the library are best avoided, especially after the sun goes down.

As a disclaimer, I have no idea what actually happened in my story. However, I lean more towards the side of “believer,” where many odd and difficult to explain happenings tend to fall under the “paranormal” category. Although I love ghost lore and all the other creepy things, I am far too much of a wimp to seek them out myself, and therefore I refuse to look any deeper into what has happened to me in this story. Honestly, I find myself giving the benefit of the doubt to most cryptids, creepies, and crawlies, on their possible existence (feels safer that way). That being said, I have never in my life had any experience like this before, and have yet to have another experience like it since, ghostly or otherwise.

I attend a small school in the middle of North Carolina that is well known by everyone on campus to be thoroughly and utterly riddled with ghosts. Guilford College's campus is a very old Quaker campus that, at one point in time, served as an infirmary/military hospital during the Civil War. We have also apparently suffered from a lot of fires, or so the lore goes. These, among other things, have resulted in almost all of our buildings having some sort of ghostly history behind them, always enthusiastically indulged and confirmed by our Public Safety officers, who patrol the buildings on campus even during the wee hours of the morning. If you ask, they will happily tell you which spirits are friendly, which aren't, and even tell you some of their own experiences with these spirits. It's spooky as hell.

The three main purportedly haunted buildings on our campus (hauntings of which I am fully convinced, purely based on the sheer inability to be alone in certain parts of these buildings, even after having spent a great deal of time in each of them) are our auditorium, proudly housing three spirits, our library, which I personally believe to play host to a poltergeist, and the all-women's dormitory I spent my Junior year living in. In all three of these buildings, I have felt a certain indescribable energy to the point at which I refuse to use certain bathrooms, go in certain areas alone, or avoid completely after dark. I could go on and on, but this story takes place in a different building all-together, and I have a really bad habit of being chronically long-winded, so I'll cut myself off now.

When I first got to Guilford, I formed many of my friendships by sharing my knowledge of paranormal happenings on campus and theorizing about if ghosts are real,¹ if they

¹ They are.

live on our campus² and what in the world we could possibly do about these ghosts. We were excited, energized, and splendidly terrified.

I remember early in our first semester, many of my newly found friends wanted to do an investigation of our auditorium just to see what they could find, and since I was someone who sparked a couple of those first speculative conversations, they begged me to tag along. I fervently denied. No way was I going to get mixed up with some shit that could follow me for the rest of my life. So, they did their investigation, had some fun, and came back with some unexplainable photos and videos, particularly of some strange activity near one of the ceiling vents. Still terrifies me, and of course our auditorium is where many of my classes are held, so from this point on, I've been totally shafted. As a cherry on top, my Religious Studies adviser, who has seen a LOT for someone his age, and has even been tricked into performing an exorcism in a haunted house in Tibet, has his office in this same building professionally warded. Shit is real.

Shortly after my friends decided to perform this investigation, something strange happened to me, in the dead of night.

The dorm I lived in freshman year is one of the newest buildings on campus, and the only times I ever really felt that telltale tickle on the back of my neck in any way was during the occasional late night visit to our dormitory's communal restroom. I assumed I had lucked out and gotten placed in one of the non-haunted buildings on campus; perhaps I had become too comfortable.

One evening, of which the exact date is now lost on me, I was climbing into bed around 11PM. I had just finished a phone call with my now ex-boyfriend, and was feeling thoroughly exhausted. Around 11:30, I felt myself drifting off to sleep, and soon I was in the midst of a very, very unsettling dream.

Now, let me just say before I go any further:

My dreams are almost always extremely vivid. Nightmares included. Usually very long and complicated, and my sensory capabilities never seem to be impaired.

I also have a very hard time staying asleep for the whole night unless someone is in bed with me. It's been this way since I was young, and I often snuck into my parent's room on nights where I felt frightened, or would even climb into bed with my younger sister.

I feel as though I just needed to inform you of this before moving on, as the strangeness of the situation is only heightened by these two very normal parts of my life.

As I'm quickly falling into my seemingly familiar nightmare realm, I realize that everything in this supposed dream world is so vivid that it seems to be completely real, my sleep-state indiscernible from the waking. Only making this task of discernment more

² They do.

difficult is the fact that nothing I can see in my dream has changed in the slightest from what I was seeing while falling asleep.

In the dream, I am facing my window, laying on my side in my dorm room bed, looking at my phone - exactly how I know I fell asleep. Now in my dream, that uncomfortable, tingling sensation that you feel when you know you're being watched from outside of your periphery begins to creep down my spine, dripping slowly, almost painfully. Struck with fear, I hardly notice the abnormal pace at which my heart is pounding, knocking hard against my ribcage, or the tears welling up and spilling out.

As my dream self is apparently braver than my waking self, I turn over in my bed and study the dark room that envelops me. In this dorm room, there is a spot near the door for pantry space or a fridge, so the wall is slightly sunken about three feet before you get to the door, creating a little wall to slightly shield this corner from view. I realize that all of my energy is focused, almost drawn to this spot, which was absolutely the darkest corner of the room and, in this instance, it feels even darker. The darkness reels me in, mesmerizing me, almost as though I'm in a staring contest with someone who I can't see. Then, as I am about to write this off as nothing, something dark, black, and extremely lanky lopes out from the corner, and leaves through the door in a hurry, slamming it as it disappears outside the frame.

With the slam of the door, I wake up in a start, now facing the direction I had been facing in my dream. As I wake, I'm horrified to catch the sight of a long, lanky, dark shadow hurriedly leaving through the door, which subsequently slams shut, exactly as it had happened in my dream.

Now, If I could explain this as sleep paralysis, I would; but when I woke, I know I moved immediately, frozen to my bed only out of fear. Admittedly, this moment lasted only about three seconds all together, yet still stands as the most confusing, if not the most horrific experience of my life.

Feeling uncharacteristically confident, I switched on my phone flashlight and checked the room to make sure that it hadn't just been my roommate leaving for a late night visit to the restroom, and that there weren't any clothes hanging in the corner that could have been mistaken for shadows. As everything was in order, I was, and remain to this day to be at a total and utter loss of an explanation. This is where it gets even weirder.

Although I have a notoriously difficult time sleeping through the night, I at least make it 3 hours or so until I wake up the first time. When I finally took a second to check the time on my phone, thinking it should have been 3 or 4AM, it was only 12:15AM, meaning I had been asleep for 45 minutes at most. To this day, this strange sleep pattern has never recurred, even during the most restless of sleeps.

Just for good measure, I asked my roommate the next day if she had gotten up in the

middle of the night or even simply noticed the door slamming shut (as I had heard and witnessed both in my dream and after waking). She had seen and heard absolutely nothing, and slept peacefully through the night.

I remain convinced that somehow I experienced catching this strange, lanky creature snooping in my room both through a dream as I was sleeping, and not as a dream, but as a waking truth. I still struggle to find an appropriate explanation for this four years later, and even now, as I write, I feel that same, strange tickle on the back of my neck, as if someone is still watching from a shadowy corner.

The Politics of Love

Purple nail polish never looked better on those hands, with your opal rings and your hair flowing in the wind like in the movies. Your beauty is hard to describe, its subtle and edgy, but there is something magnetizing there. Honestly, your face is not symmetrical and your eyebrows are sparse and your piercings just don't go, but still.

"Hey, you listening to me?"

Yes, I'm listening. Watching you press your lips together letting out philosophical nonsense and chewing that green gum between your teeth. Why do I like you?

Maybe you put a hex on me. Or maybe we do belong.

I knew I liked you because you were really good at solving sudoku puzzles and crafting origami birds. But, also your music taste was superb, but lately, it's not enough for me.

After, I found out who you voted for last election, it's been messing with my stomach and my head. The vote told me a lot without you saying a word. I thought I wasn't political, but I run the scenario over and over in my head, picturing you marking the ballot, and it just isn't right.

I don't think we can be together anymore.

Tenoch A.

Eden, and What Comes After

At 18, I gave my heart to a curious boy
because he reminded me
of climbing vines, ivy growing up
the side of my childhood home.
Soon after, my father clipped that ivy
because it began to grow too thick.
At 20, I took my heart back.

It was then that I learned God's Adam
too is covered in ivy and has
eyes the color of evergreen leaves.
All day he cross-breeds roses
and gives each new creation a name.
Eve's deft fingers connect daisy chains,
but she never wears them.

Sometimes when the night is so still
I cannot hear the sound of my own voice,
I sit by the river in my backyard and reach deep
into my own chest. I break off the rib he gave me,
remembering that I can walk on my own.
Dirt sticks to the bottoms of my feet, and
the last thought I have of him
is that he never went barefoot,
not even by the river.

(He no longer looks like Adam.
I no longer look like Eve.

You, however.
You have never looked like Eve.)
Dear girl—
Never forget that whenever you want, you can
clip your own ivy. You are free to break off that rib.
You can tie your daisy chains
into crowns and wear them
proudly, walking barefoot by yourself on a riverbank.
You can create strong, beautiful, impossible things
with the dirt on your feet.

Dear girl, remember—
It does not always take a rib.



Old Town, New Years
Bennis Salmanisto II
Ink

The Courage to Commit Murder

I'm trying my best to absorb all I hear. In biology, it's the importance of cell division, and in education, it's the values of a colonial education, and in music, it's the history of rock-and-roll. It's the contributions of Gregor Mendel on genetics, the influence of Thomas Jefferson and Noah Webster on education reform, and it's the impact of James Brown on funk. There's a lot of absorption and not a lot of liberation. It's because I'm scared.

What if I let it out? These ideas... Will they one day be picked apart in a liberal arts college classroom like the phenomenal *Passing* or the charming stories contained in *Birds of America*? No, they won't. They aren't good enough. They aren't interesting enough. They aren't funny enough. They aren't masterpieces. But is any work of art?

Then, I've got it. In the middle of a lecture about the third stage of mitosis, which I think is metaphase, I've got it. An idea. There's a ship sailing into my psyche; ramshackle and rundown, it looks as though it once sank and somehow resurfaced. It's a steamship. The kind with the big wheel on the back—what's that called? Never mind. I'll have to look it up later, because now, there's a woman. She's a red head. She's a socialite. She needs help—wait. A helpless red head on a boat? C'mon. That's been done time and time again.

Instead, she's vain. She's charismatic. She's—wait. There's someone else. A man. He's an immigrant. He's like her. He's—wait. Now there's a butler. A gardener. The captain. There's been a murder. There are flashbacks. Suddenly there are so many stories waiting to be told, lining up in a disorganized procession at the gates of my mind. There are ideas pouring in like a dam of creativity has burst. I scribble down the ideas that make the most sense—quickly—before another tramples across my brain, stomping out the smaller details—what color were the butler's eyes again? Wait—of course! The captain wears white—it makes perfect sense! It's *symbolism*.

I take all of these thoughts and put them into one of those plastic sifters you use at the beach to separate your sand from your shells—and then—I've got it! A beginning, a middle and an end. I've got the characters: they've got substance, dreams, desires—there's a theme, too—or better yet, several. And of course, there's surprise ending. It's perfect. It's *too* perfect. So, I decide to keep this idea in my head. I keep it in my head and let the story play out over and over, where it'll be safe, like a perfect production written, performed, and produced by myself. Like a rehearsal where the players always nail their parts, and the lighting is always just right, and the crowd loves every minute of it.

But the story doesn't have a beginning, a middle, or an end. The characters don't have substance, dreams and desires—not yet. I need others to hear what they have to say. I need others to know what's inside my head. So, to avoid imprisoning my ideas inside my mind, to avoid drowning them in a brain that's slowly dying, I decide that there will be an opening night. There will be a day when I'm ready to open the curtains, to show the world my work on stage, to let to world see my perfectly, precisely planned epic, to let the world see what I only have seen—when I put my pen to paper and kill it.

The Gen Z Guide to Letting Him Go

1

stay in bed for exactly
24 hours,
then go outside.
then come back inside.

2

delete him on Snapchat.
fifteen minutes later,
delete your entire Snapchat.

3

let your roommate make you
a Tinder profile. swipe right
on anyone with his name,
then unmatched those who
also swipe right on you.

4

stop looking at his Spotify
playlists searching for signs
of yourself. instead,
queue any and all breakup
songs you can find,
only the angry ones.

5

unfollow him on Twitter.
pretend you don't know
that his account isn't private.

6

try to ignore the new song
he records on Soundcloud.
fail repeatedly.
keep trying.

7

use Tumblr to vagueblog
about him. go back
and delete every post
you have tagged with his name.

8

down your Instagram feed
with pics of your food so you
have to scroll to see his face.
then don't scroll.

9

deactivate your Facebook
so you can't stalk him.
so you can't even try.

10

open the documents folder
on your laptop.
drag every poem
you have written for him
to the trash.

Anonymous

Phases

Close my eyes and breathe, try to focus but struggle not to look away.

It seems that everything is more interesting than what's supposed to be imperative.

Always trying to be focused as everyone says to be, but cannot seem to stay muted to a single space.

It's like being trapped in a small box struggling to do my own thing but at the same time pulling back like a puppet on a puppet string to stay on base.

It's like being a monkey trying to become a sloth when deep inside it just wants to be free running around basking in a sunlit bay.

Wanting to scream in frustration,

Cry in desperation

And shriek in helplessness

NOTHING seems to work, until

A light appears.

A spark of inspiration trumping desperation.

A flutter of a way to be taught differently, a chance to become a monkey instead of a sloth.

It seemed to taste like...

Freedom

And

Life full of color again.

Stefany Florian

Day Two of a Week at Dad's

(It Didn't Last a Week)

The building was dusty and beige, alone on an abandoned dirt lot. Its right side was a landslide of two-by-fours, fragments of metal, and flaky ceiling tiles. The car had passed by this point multiple times a day for the past two days, and each time I rehearsed the words in my head to ensure they had the desired effect, or at the very least didn't sound stupid or wrong. I was finally satisfied with my composition, so I opened my mouth to say something. Something about how it looked like a hurricane had come through and hit that building and nothing else.

That moment, no words came from my mouth, but a loud sound that I didn't hear, and deafening whiteness. The next moment, blinding screeching static in my ears, the feeling that the bones and skin of my chest were about to throw up. Rising from a weightless, empty limbo, I removed myself from the vehicle.

I sometimes like to imagine that there's a two-dimensional painting rolling by outside the windows of every moving car. The buildings, trees, and objects that lie more than ten meters past the sidewalk or road shoulder aren't included in the image. Now, trembling, my senses numb, the ruined lot felt very three-dimensional. To the other cars still on the street, my father, his hatchback, and I, were all part of the landscape. The folded hood rotated on the asphalt like a carousel, and a cloud of starch from the airbags plumed out from the open doors. My father and I stood inanimate. I was a pale little girl, my skin turned white by the powder that covered me, and I wore little tangerine and pink polka-dot shorts tied with a little pink belt. He was a man of average height, with long, matted hair and thick glasses obscuring his eyes, and faded, baggy clothing cloaking his chunky frame. He looked down at the earth, and I watched him and waited for some kind of cue. My head was as empty as the tiny human figures in a piece of sublime art, and for a moment I existed as nothing but scenery.

Out from the maroon pickup truck we hit came the other driver and his parents. The two vehicles looked like they had been involved in separate accidents; while our Kia was totaled, they were later able to drive their truck away from the scene. They were spoken to, and it was deemed that no one was hurt but me. More than one person asked whether I needed the hospital, if an ambulance should be called. I had a frame of reference for scraped knees and sprained ankles, but not for this. I said I didn't know. No ambulance came, and still I've never gotten around to having my broken sternum checked out.

The police car came. My father sat up front with the officer while I sat in the back and listened to words I didn't understand.

Soon enough my father stepped out of and away from the police car. I banged on the reinforced window and shouted for him to come back and release me. I hadn't known that there weren't handles on the insides of the back doors. He must have forgotten.

My shock was fading, but my body was still trembling like I was being electrocuted. There was a woman there, a stranger. I had seen her before, before the airbags deployed, walking along the side of the road. She was middle-aged and maternal, and I was pressed

to the breast of her pastel T-shirt without warning. My left eye was lost in her softness, and the vision through my right was foggy white as I stared at the dirt.

In a Smoky Mountain drawl, the woman said something intended to be comforting, like expressing concern or encouragement. As if she was afraid of what would happen to me once she let go, she squeezed me tight, like a teddy bear. Pain fired into my sternum where I had collided with the locked seatbelt. I tried to push away after what I judged to be an appropriate amount of moments, but the woman restrained me and I didn't struggle. Easier to wait it out. The woman said something else, like calling me nice names or wishing me well, then vanished beyond the limits of my clouded vision.

The moment she let go, I turned around and moved my feet towards my father, teetering and unsound, as though a hurricane had blown through, hit me and nothing else. My father, sobbing, shaking, his back to me, sat in the dirt and cried. I touched his shoulder and said something intended to be comforting, about how it was going to be okay, it wasn't his fault, or, hey, at least no one got badly hurt.

The blindness from the starch in my eyes lasted a few hours, the nausea and pain in my breastbone wouldn't be gone for weeks and would continue to return in response to pressure or blows, and the emotions I decided to deny would take me years to properly identify. Anger, contempt, shame. Anger that I could only be soothed by a stranger, that my trauma was mine alone to reconcile or suppress. Contempt at his tears, because by then I knew it was easier for everyone to just pretend to care sometimes. Because at age eleven I knew it would be easier for everyone if I held my tears in, and at forty-eight he didn't. Shame at my anger and contempt, shame that I felt shame. Shame that the people spectating the scene were seeing my father like this. Shame that I was so used to seeing him like this.

The Raven

I can't see nothin' in this storm
 Glassy windowpane, hazy mountains
The Landscape is lightning-struck wood
 Black-brown, sopping
Dead with rain, alive
With the some adjective memory of lightning

The/my Heart's like a clock
 Twitching in the sub-basement.
The roads are howling with ghosts and there's
Nothing to do but wait
While the soft running of the thunder still carries that white-hot menace

At this hour, some great bird
 Has taken up residence
On my heart-cornices.
I would have left long ago,
Had I known the weight
 Of his feathers
Please take your form
Somewhere
 Else

I tell him,
 And his eyes glitter.
Nah, sis
Quoth the raven
Ya doin just fine
Trust me, when we have the need
 To lurk, we are
Born to it

Something's healing in the darkness
Soon, the mushrooms will come up
They will have puffy faces and wide eyes
And infinite lung capacity

For screaming?
 Oh, yes —
And for the singing.

Iris Newlin



Still Life
Lan Truong
Graphite

The Crows, His Gulls

The two goldfish were, and then they weren't. They spent their lives watching Mr. Shepherd, whose name they did not know, from their position on his bookshelf—to their left a white whale, and to their right a book of sailing knots. For all he could tell, they were content, if not happy; never could he discern from either a decisive frown (or smile, for that matter). Although they died of starvation, one fish met its fate a few minutes before the other, an interval small enough that it would prove exceedingly remarkable, if anyone ever knew it. But, alas, no one did, for they died while Mr. Shepherd was in the hospital, and the peculiarity of their times of departure was lost on the world.

Mr. Shepherd had but one child, a meek son, from a marriage long lost. The son had a daughter, to whom the goldfish were to be a gift. On the day that he'd bought them, she had said that They're not really very gold. Sure they are, he replied. No they're not, they're just shiny and orange. He told her that That's what gold is, and she asked if there's such thing as silverfish. Yeah, but they're not really fish. You don't want those.

When he first moved, Mr. Shepherd put a pool in his yard, the above-ground kind, big and blue. You couldn't see the water from inside his home, but he knew it was there. He'd hired some neighborhood boys to put it together, fill it up, but they didn't do it in time and he said that it's within his rights to sue, so they took even longer. He'd wanted a pool for some time. He was from the beach, once, and the pool was to be his inland ocean, the crows, his gulls. On warm days, he'd float and focus on the bluest part of the sky above, almost convince himself that the wind carried salt and that at any moment a sprig of seaweed may brush his rear end.

The neighbors, parents of the boys who built the pool, were displeased; the thing was an atrocity, the fluorescent blue cherry on top of his already shambled lawn. The children took to calling him Rick the Dick, and the parents scolded them, inwardly proud.

Mr. Shepherd heard the name whispered in the yard adjacent, the syllables trickling through slats in his fence. He scowled and went back to his beach.

The son wasn't pleased, said the daughter wouldn't feed the goldfish and it'd just be his responsibility. You can't just win her over with some fish, Rick. He called his father by his first name, neither of them really remembered when it happened.

As his flesh sagged, gravity pushing him back into the earth, his time in the pool became shorter and shorter. The gulls didn't caw as loud, the breeze became flat and bland, the neighbor boys' voices grew louder, deeper. He took note, wasn't pleased, scowled about. And then, as if it all was simply foreplay, Mr. Shepherd had his fall, tripped climbing out of the pool. His hip was broken, his ankle badly sprained, and he was confined to a hospital bed for several days and then a wheelchair for several weeks. It was then that his goldfish, the only roommates to speak of, returned to the earth.

Aidan was the one who'd discovered the dead fish. He thought of his daughter's disdain when he wouldn't let her keep them, and poured the corpses into the toilet bowl. He thought of his father's unspoken fondness for them, companionship, and decided he had to piss. He flushed, the corpses returned to the sewer. Good riddance.

If Mr. Shepherd hadn't been immobilized, if he'd found them first, he would have

had a funeral. Not with Aidan, of course, but on his own. He would have maybe thought a few words, arranged a little coffin, the likes. He'd have liked to bury them underneath the pool, return them to the sea. No matter, because Aidan had found them first and he flushed them before Mr. Shepherd was aware. He found out when his eyes met the bowl, emptied of its inhabitants but still lined with bright blue pebbles, littered fake plants. It sat on the bookshelf, where it had been, wedged between boating manuals and tomes of aquatic adventure. From his wheelchair, Mr. Shepherd's gaze found itself in the flat side of the bowl. His eyes met his reflection and he let out a Hmph, his only eulogy, for Aidan was present, and that was it.

I'm not going to a fucking home, he said, later.

Rick, come on. The son's eyes were fixed on the ceiling, a minuscule lump in the paint. He wondered if Rick had ever noticed it before, if anyone had, if anyone ever would. Would he be the last one? The only one?

No, and that's it. I don't want to hear anything else about it.

The son accepted defeat, for now, slunk off to the guest room. He was staying for a little while, making sure things went alright. Aidan's daughter was with her grandmother, this wasn't a place for children.

During his visit, Aidan took it upon himself to do his best to clean up the yard, a feeble apology to the neighbors. Mr. Shepherd's recent hobby was arguing with the family to the south about property lines, and a tree that infringed upon his fence. It's well within his rights to sue, he said. Aidan spent his days raking, pruning, ridding the lawn of fallen limbs. He found a collection of lost toys, launched unintentionally over the fence and abandoned, then later pushed into a small pile by the owner. Aidan looked at them with resentment, then looked to the pool, Rick's own toy.

He couldn't see the water from his wheelchair, and oh, how he fucking hated it. All he could see was the son, puttering about in the yard, keeping busy, keeping his distance. He sat in the living room, staring out the glass door and into the side of the pool. Crows cawed and they were not seagulls, the air was still and sick.

Mr. Shepherd's library kept him from complete stasis. Watching his pool, he flipped back and forth through *Maritime Seamanship: How You Ought Knot*. A bit of string twirled about in his fingers, contorting itself into the most prestigious shapes and figures, practicing for a time long past.

That night, he dreamt of rain, rain, rain, a monsoon coming from the east, Get below deck, fasten the sails, get ready, get ready. Water poured through his mind, in one ear and out the other, rinsing it, and he was there: on the boat, hoisting the main sail, scurrying about the deck as wave after wave did their best to topple the schooner. He beat the waves, woke with a grin, and stayed silent most of the day, string twirling and eyes watching the sky for signs of storm. He still couldn't see the water, the pool was too high, and Aidan busied himself in the yard till dusk.

At dinner, Rick was feeling uncooperative, emboldened.

It's much better, there. There's other people. Don't you want that?

Nope. Mr. Shepherd wasn't smiling, exactly, but his tone was. He picked at the plastic dish, gelatinous Salisbury steak, freshly thawed.

You could get out of this fucking house, sighed his son. He wondered where the speck in the paint was, if anyone had seen it around.

I like this fucking house.

Aidan was silent, picked at his dinner. He'd go get real food once Rick was asleep, a diner down the block.

Mr. Shepherd dreamt of rushing water again. It was vivid enough that it brought him back to consciousness, a bit, and he could still hear it, waves crashing, pouring over his bed, flooding his body. His pajamas were wet, but he didn't notice.

And so it went. Mr. Shepherd longed for his ocean, stared at the big blue atrocity as a child ogles wrapped presents weeks before Christmas. His fingers fiddled with bits of string and his book of nautical knots blanketed his knees, his wheelchair immobile. Aidan tidied till dinner, Rick dreamt of rushing water. Rick would be able to stand in just a week, Aidan could leave.

Waves crashing, six days, a frisbee under a bush, five, I'm not going, four, Mr. Shepherd salivated at the side of his pool, three, splashing, splashing, splashing, two.

His dreams that night were only a trickle, a mellow brook whispering about toy ships and shiny orange minnows. Aidan didn't sleep and when Mr. Shepherd awoke, his son wasn't around. He didn't notice right away, for today he had legs, legs that could walk, swim. He swung off the bed, eased his feet to the floor. With his good leg, he pushed the wheelchair to the corner. The other appendage still ached, but it was time; Aidan had urged him to use a cane, You'll fall again, but no, That's nonsense. He stood, teetered, balanced, and took several steps to the door of his bedroom. He grasped the doorknob, supporting himself, turned it and walked through.

Aidan wasn't around. The house was empty, dark, minus a select few rays of sun streaking the air from the glass door to where Mr. Shepherd stood. It was as if it were holy, a beam of power absolute, a divine direction pointing Mr. Shepherd toward his grail.

He hobbled past the dining table, ignoring the cane propped against it, the envelope marked Rick that lay there. He hobbled past his bookshelf, his reflection, his only audience, watching him from the long-empty fishbowl. He made it to the door, eyes locked with the pool, went through it, across the patio, into the grass. He was an arm's-reach away and he reached it, peered into his ocean and was met with shipwreck.

The sea had been drained, the spout in the side twisted off, drop by drop, gallon by gallon, a little every night. Not too much to alert him, the lawn couldn't flood, but enough to bring waves into his bedroom, his dreams. Mr. Shepherd grasped the side of the pool, for support, his jaw forming a quiet, discernible frown. From the depths of the sewer, his goldfish frowned too. His grip tightened, his knuckles paled. He closed his eyes and then his mouth, his lips a sad and still arch.

He pulled himself along to the steps of the pool, then up, over, in. In the center of the pool he bent over, braced himself, and sat. He lay down, spread his arms and legs, and looked to the sky. He heard the trees rustling and couldn't feel the breeze. The sky was blue, inland blue, and a crow had shit in the pool. It wasn't a beach.

His fish were dead and his son had left, taking the sea with him. On the table, he left a brochure for Saint Erasmus Retirement Community, and next to it a cane.

...

Mr. Shepherd had asked the woman on the phone if he could have a room with fish on the walls. Yes, sir, she said, that shouldn't be a problem. The night before he moved in, they'd placed little construction paper cutouts around the room, a few bubbles and a scuba diver.

He'd asked the neighbors if the boys would help him with his pool, but they'd grown up already, gone away. Anyhow, Aidan had poked little holes in the sides and few had pity for Rick the Dick. Mr. Shepherd sat at the table, eyeing the brochure, until his fingers brought themselves to dial the number. After the call, he picked up the cane and hobbled to his favorite chair, spent the rest of the day looking out at the pool.

So there he lay, with Saint Erasmus. He hadn't bothered buying new fish, real ones, but he'd moved his library in and his maritime books lined the shelves of a small bookcase with rubber on the corners. The home had a pool, communal, that was closed most of the year. Anyway, you had to pass a swimming test to get in, and Mr. Shepherd thought it absurd. He spent his time watching the ceiling, the paper fish swimming about the walls. He fiddled with string until one day his fingers shook so much that he dropped it. He left it there, and forgot about it. His books grew dusty and *How You Ought Knot* crawled with little grey insects. You don't want those, he'd said once.



Dead Flowers
Lolita Lupita
Mixed media

We Picked Apples in a Graveyard Freshly Mowed

The song is sung by a gentle giant who sits alone, cramped in the ruins of a castle long abandoned alongside the Norweigen Alps, his hands trembling as he struggles not to crush the tiny lute under the weight of his cold and bawdy hands. Harsh winds climb past the comfy abodes, nestled securely in the embrace of the mountain range, and up through the castle window, stinging his frostbitten nostrils. His legs are scarred by the spearheads of the villagers whose affection he longs for, and he can taste the remnants of their disdain amongst the snowflakes as they crawl through his pursed lips and upon his tongue. An assortment of lost, shining trinkets litter the cobblestone floor. He presents them ardently to an imaginary mother, who cradles and calms him as his stilled mewls decorate the desolate castle halls. The mothers below his haunt tuck their children into their beds lovingly, and he looks out the window longingly as he sings:

“Hold me, Hold me,
and never let me go.”

The Collateral and the Consequence

The evening sun shone on the well-beaten sand, reflecting the wooden town before him, the only sounds being his iron-hoofed horse and the grunting of the man hogtied atop it. He squeezed the palomino's side and clutched the Peacemaker at his own. "C'mon, Friday," the man said, patting the mane in front of him, "We better empty the trash 'fore the sun goes down." The gagged man behind him groaned.

The town grew larger on the horizon as the horse's steps quickened. "Good evening, Rick," the haberdasher said, waving to the man on the horse. "Who you got there?"

"Ah, just another of them gangsters. This'n was caught rapin' and pillagin' near old Tumbleweed; figured I could use the money."

"Maybe you wanna use some of it for clothes without bloodstains and holes in 'em?"

"Maybe," Rick said, sauntering along.

"Alright," the man mumbled, "you have a good night now."

"You too."

Rick continued down the dirt road towards the jail, the many footsteps scattered about before him alluding to the activity of the day. As he passed the town's general store, its doors flew open and an aproned man walked out. "Rick!"

"How are ya, sir?" he responded.

"My head hurts like hell, but I can't complain," the man ran a callused hand through his gray hair. "You got them orange poppies I asked for?"

"You don't miss a trick, huh?" Rick reached into the saddlebag to his left, "here ya go."

"Thank ya kindly."

Rick carried on until he approached the old Sheriff's office sharing space with the jail. He dismounted from his steed and tied the reins to the post outside the rickety building; "down ya come," he said to the bound man as he dragged him writhing from the back of it. Hearing the commotion, a man stepped out of the doors adjacent to Rick, clad in a straw hat that seemed to reflect the dimming rays better than the brass badge over his breast.

"Here, lemme help ya with that," he said, grabbing the mass of rope at the criminal's ankles. "You know," he continued, grunting as the man squirmed and moaned, "you don't always have to bring 'em back alive."

"I know," Rick said, looking up to meet the sheriff's eyes.

"Hmm," he replied, before backing into the doors of the jail, and subsequently tossing the man into a cell surrounded in iron just behind a cluttered desk. "Now," he said, exhaling while taking a seat behind it, "what's he worth again?" Rick reached into his tattered coat pocket and procured an unevenly folded paper.

"You said twenty. I'll take fifteen if you don't hang 'em."

The sheriff exhaled again. "Rick, why do you always do this brother? Do I need to tell you what he did to get that bounty? Bad things, Rick."

"One more person at the gallows is also a bad thing, Sheriff."

"Not if it means saving a mother from digging a grave," the man replied, sliding twenty dollars across the one clean track of his tabletop. "Take it. Enjoy yourself tonight, alright?" Rick took the money before him without shifting his sightline.

"See you tomorrow," he said, turning to exit.

"No, you won't, Rick! Take the weekend off for once! Hell, take several, God knows you've earned it."

Rick bypassed his horse as he stuffed the payment into his pocket, heading instead to another building along the stretch of lamplit road. From down the street he could already hear the clang of mugs and the smack of poker chips being thrown down from out of the saloon's batwing doors. "Hey there, Rick!" The voice sounded in his periphery. He turned and saw the barber outside his shop. "What ya doin'?"

"Headed for the watering trough. You?"

"Ah I'm still open for a while, got nothin' better to do since the wife is angry at me, ya know." He gestured as though Rick would understand. "Say, you want me to give you a quick trim? Maybe it'll do ya some good when it comes to the ladies," he said smiling.

"Ah, I'm alright," Rick replied politely, "I'm just tryna settle down for the night."

"I hear ya friend. Have a good one."

"You too."

Rick turned and continued to the saloon, entering its doors like a moth who finally broke into the lantern. Light and sound engulfed his senses, a massive juxtaposition to the outdoors, one that already made him feel buzzed. For once nobody seemed to take notice of him. He took a seat at the bar, resting his shoulders, and called for the keeper. "My usual, if you would."

"You got it," the bartender replied before turning away. The droning commotion of the large room gave way to a breathy argument a few stools down from Rick. A man gripped a woman's wrist as he quietly berated her. Rick's attention was broken though when his drink slammed down in front of him.

"Hey," he said to the man behind the counter, "you know anything about them two?"

"Can't say I do," he said shaking his head, "just know that he been at her throat for goin' on half an hour now. Figure it's none of my business."

"Alright, then. Thank you kindly," Rick said, dismissively.

He'd just finished the last swig of his drink when the man stormed off and left the woman in subdued tears, her figure crumbling in on itself in the stool. Rick watched as her abuser left the premises, then he slid to her side. "You alright, ma'am?" he said with a hand hovering over her shoulder. He chuckled. "You look like you could use a drink." She unfurled herself in what looked to be a battle with her own spine. The barkeep came over with two tankards, each fizzing to the top.

"Ten cents for the lady's."

As Rick cleared his throat to reply, the woman suddenly spoke: "Mister, I ain't worth no dime. I ain't even worth a shiny penny; save your money."

Rick slid a quarter across the table. "Keep the change. Consider it a tip."

The woman chugged the beverage before her. "What's your name, if you don't mind my asking?" Rick said after watching her gulp it down in one swig.

"Madelynn," she said in a whisper, "yours?"

"Rick. Nice to meet you, Madelynn."

"And you," she replied.

"Might I ask another question, Miss Madelynn?"

"You may not. And it's Misses."

"My sincerest apologies, Mrs. Madelynn. What was happenin' between you and that man?"

"That man," she began...

"Is just keepin' his wife in line, Good Sir. And who might you be?" The man wedged himself in between Rick and Madelynn, orienting himself so as to stare the former in his eyes.

"You can call me Rick, or just Bounty Hunter if it pleases ya."

"I see," he said, the stench of beer on his breath, "and I'm guessin' my harlot of a wife didn't mention she's married huh? Eh it don't matter no how, I'm headed for the hoosegow anyways. You can have the wench."

"Going to jail? What for? Abusin' this fine lady a pastime of yours I reckon?" Rick said, his hand sliding down to his bullet-studded belt.

The man glanced down, following Rick's movements, then looked up without worry. "Nah, it's 'cause she's gonna rat me out to the sheriff after what I do tomorrow."

"I told you I won't!" she said, louder than anything prior.

"Yeah... I suppose we goin' to meet again come time tomorrow. I gots me a train to rob."

"A train huh? There ain't no trains 'round these parts I fear," Rick said, smirking.

"Correct, but the city bank runs a locomotive down the tracks of ol' Tumbleweed I hear. I gots me a baby to feed," he said, smacking Madelynn's stomach, "and them city folk got more than enough as is."

"Well, you ain't gon' get no fuss outta me," Rick replied, "What you're describin' is exactly why Sheriff and I only see talk through posters and dollars."

"Well, that reminds me actually," the man said, mimicking Rick's smirk, "you might find one of them posters hangin' out tomorrow mornin'. I gots a troublemaker out there at my camp who's tryna get all the spoils for none of the effort. You willin' to help a man? As I see it you owe me any how seein' as you comin' on to my wife and all."

"He didn't!" Madelynn said. The man got up with a squeak of his chair legs and walked off into the night.

"Are you really gonna help him, Rick?" Madelynn said, wearing a better poker face than any of the gamblers behind them.

"No, ma'am. In fact, I'm thinkin' of bringing him in along with this hooligan of his—collect double the bounty."

"And my baby? You'll let it starve?"

"I won't let that happen, Miss."

She cocked her head. "And I suppose you want a reward for your troubles, huh? You's a man and all so I know it don't come free."

"It does, Madelynn," Rick said, getting up, "good night." He left as she exhaled loudly.

The next morning, the dirt road was un-trampled, the town quiet. Rick strode over to that familiar lamppost, and saw the bounty blowing in the wind for a suspected stalker in Tumbleweed. He snatched the paper from its place, hopped on his horse, and rode off after surveying the amount of rope he'd need for two.

Upon entering the location described on the notice, Rick noticed nothing resembling a camp. In the distance though, stood a figure, black against the high noon sun. Rick approached it. "Hello, Rick!" the man from the previous night yelled out. "Great day for a

train robbery, no? I hope you don't mind that I added a little drama; I had a lot of time on my hands last night!" He pointed to the tracks half a mile to Rick's left; and he could just make out the silhouettes of multiple people tied to them.

"What have you done?" Rick screamed, walking briskly with lead steps to the man.

"Ah, I was drunk," the man replied sarcastically. Rick tackled him and began punching him furiously until he heard a sound. In the far distance came the roar of an engine and the distinct pattern of axles being twisted by it. Rick knocked out cold the man below him with a whip of his pistol, then rushed to the side of the tracks. The train was advancing fast.

The tracks lay forked before him, the alternate path closest to him brandishing five bound and gagged people: the haberdasher, the general store owner, the sheriff, the barber, and the barkeep. On the straight route was just one person: Madelynn. The train was in clear view now, and Rick didn't carry a knife.

Rick needn't look far for the railroad switch. He ran to it, looking it over while trying to quell the tears in his eyes. The deafening sound of the locomotive's horn combined with its screeching breaks did nothing to help his internal thought. One versus five, simple. But she's pregnant, and young. Except pulling this lever means murdering five people. Either way the guilt will be haunting. Rick looked at the each of the tracks, then at the train, then at the lever, then at his Peacemaker. He'd made his decision.



You Want to Go for a Ride?

Leo Blain
Photograph



Imagination, Life is Your Creation

Leo Blain
Photograph

The Furnace at the Edge of Time

It is just Him and me now. Everyone else is dead; we could not support them anymore. What they don't tell you is that nothing is a renewable resource if you wait long enough. It does not seem like it, but after only a few billion years, even the stars die.

"Not to worry," they said, "The red dwarves can burn for a trillion years!"

In the blink of an eye, those too had gone.

"Worry not," they said again, "for black holes, which leak radiation, last upwards of a quadrillion years."

Well, here we are...

Our civilization has lasted longer than computers could calculate. But when the universe was at the brink of decay, it was my closest friend who solved our problem. He invented a machine that converts matter into energy. We call it The Furnace. Now He and I toil everyday moving things into the machine so that we may survive. We have dismantled cities, planets, and all else that exists. Each a handful at a time.

It is all meaningless in the end, but it makes Him so happy. I find my own joy in collecting objects from our dismantling. I have kept toys and trinkets, books and art. Sometimes He convinces me to burn some of my objects for energy when my collection gets too big, but I always refuse to burn the books. They are too important. They will be all that is left of us when—

When—

No. He has told me not to think of when. If. If sounds better.

The light of the Furnace is the withering spark of our civilization, and when it is to go out, so are we. So day in and day out, we dismantle and burn another world. This is the last one, and He knows it. He masks fear with anger, and He fakes a smile as I walk by carrying earth. He leaves the burning room without saying anything. He doesn't speak again until the last brick from the last building of the last planet in the universe is burned. Our toil is done. He seems unsatisfied.

"Good," I tell him, "now we may finally relax and enjoy what is left of life."

His face is cold and stern like one of the statues in my collection. He ponders my words for a moment before smiling. It has been a long time since I saw a real smile.

"Yes," He says, "finally."

We sit and watch the Furnace burn. It illuminates the entire cube that is our home and the Furnace itself. Plain and white, it is a metal oasis in a desert of black. We watch in awe as the light bounces around on my statues. The glow brings new life to the faces of men and women long since passed. The twinkling light causes their eyes to blink as if they are looking upon us, thanking us for our hard work. I curl my hands in my lap and lean on His shoulder. I shut my eyes and enjoy the crackling buzz the Furnace makes as it generates energy.

"This is nice," I whisper.

I open my eyes. I am on the floor. I look around to see Him staring into the Furnace. Unmoving, He is a statue who stands directly in front of the machine. He eclipses the intense glow casting a shadow of ice on my body. I ask what He is doing. He tells me the light has been flickering. He asks if we may burn a few more items from my collection.

“Nothing too important,” He insists. “Then we may continue to relax.”

I sigh and agree to burn a few items. The statues of dictators and the outdated science textbooks. This becomes our new routine. We sit together, and as I read, He stares into the light of the Furnace as it burns. The sparks grumble inches from His face in a vain attempt to thaw His expression. We sit for only a few days before He begs me to let Him burn another item.

“Just a little more time,” He says.

I always give in because, at least for a few moments, I may bask in the glow of His joy while He basks in the glow of the Furnace.

Eventually, I have to say no. My collection is a shell of its former self. All that remains are history and science books and my favorite pieces of art. But He begs, and He pleads, and He cries. He never cries. I let Him take the art. What is important are the books which talk about the art.

I let myself pretend He can relax this one time. Maybe He can fall asleep—peacefully—Together with me and never wake up.

But time is a powerful drug. It drags Him to ask again, but this time, I do not budge until the light of the Furnace ceases. What was orange becomes black, what could be seen becomes not and what was calm becomes panic. I barely remember a time when the Furnace was not lit. I give in. I sort out all the brief, erroneous or merely evil historical accounts, and I allow the sacrifice of the more useless scientific journals. No one will need to know anymore the theories of how the world will end.

I tell Him that this is it. I will not give in to anything else. He hugs me, and He beams with a light not even the Furnace could replicate.

For a long time, He holds my hand, and we watch the light of the Furnace. He smiles and leans His head against mine. The light flickers, and He only shuts His eyes to rest.

“We are finally done,” He says.

“Yes. Finally.”

He twitches. I open my eyes. The Furnace is sputtering out, and He has sat up staring intently into the light. I do not know what He hopes to see.

“Please! Just one more book, or a page at least!” He cries.

“No!” I tell Him again and again, “no.”

He pretends to be okay. He takes a deep breath and lays on the floor. Then the Furnace blinks again, and He asks me once more. I do not budge this time.

But the flickering gets worse. There is a long, aching void of darkness between each gap of flame the Furnace sputters out.

“Please!” He shouts, “I just want to live!” He is crying now and so am I.

"But what is the point of being alive," I shout back, "when you would destroy everything that makes life worth living!"

"Just one more book! Even just the cover."

"No, it is too important."

"Please, no one is going to be around to read it."

"That doesn't matter."

"Please!"

"NO!"

I scream the word. Tears stream down my face like the waterfalls of the last world we dismantled. He curls His hands into fists as He continues begging.

"Please. I just need a little more time."

The light returns for a moment. His face is soaking wet, and His eyes are red. He looks like a child who has been hurt. He used to be that once, I think. A child.

"I'm sorry," I sob, "I can't let you."

The light leaves us again. He sniffs. In the darkness, His footsteps echo as He walks toward my collection. I put myself in His way. Still silent, He tries to walk past me, but I extend my arm so that He cannot. With a quivering lip and a soft sobbing, His face shines in the light again. The crying child has melted away to become an enraged adolescent. He strains to push me out of the way, gently, but I will not let Him pass. He again begs me to move while masking the fear in His voice with menace. I cannot let Him through. I have a line, and He knows I will not let Him cross it. He asks politely one more time. I refuse.

He hits me.

I see, in a moment of light, the fear in His eyes. I hit Him back, forcing His head to look away from me. Our hands fly back and forth like children's, neither one of us truly wanting to hurt the other. Then He curls His fist and punches me in the nose. For the first time outside of my dreams, I see the stars of the long, dead sky. I find myself on the floor, and He is starting toward my books. I squeeze my fingers around His ankle and drag Him down with me. He kicks at my hand, but I manage to crawl over Him. I punch Him in the jaw. He wrestles on top of me and—

And—

I do not remember and. It just hurts.

I can only stare at the floor; my body refuses to move. I think He is carrying me. I imagine Him sitting me down in front of the Furnace and us watching the last of the fading light together. He would apologize and sob like a baby, and I would get to fall asleep in His arms. Together we would fall asleep, content, never to wake up.

Instead, the Furnace is roaring brightly again, and my books are gone. The light flickers ever so slightly as He carries me closer. He stands in front of the machine for a long time. A teardrop falls on my face. It hurts.

Then the Furnace flames engulf me as He ultimately lets me go.

As I go, the last thing I see is that He is happy. I smile. "Finally," I whisper, to myself.



Trenchcoat
Meghan Curley
Photograph

Forms

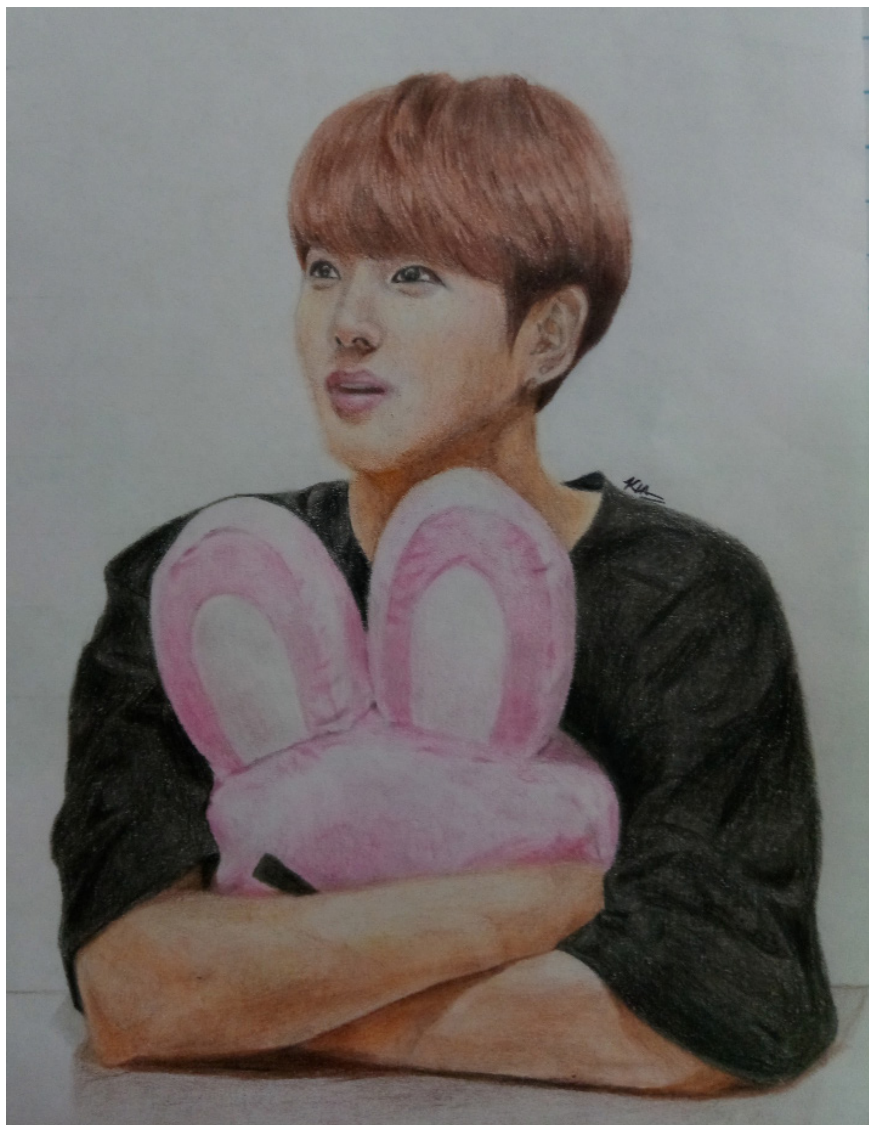
They tell us not to look at them. Yet it's hard not to marvel at all the fantastic forms appearing in between the trees. As the ashen white snow litters the darkened skyline, the forms watch us. We are shielded here, for now. Moving on and away. Not quite fast enough. Every flicker of the high beams pulls more attention towards us traversing the unforgiving night. Covered bridges serve us their warnings of the world that was, the world they belong to. The world of forms.

No Gods exist in America. Only what could have been a God. Filled with enough to make one.

Festive lights offer the illusion of safety. As if a life beyond the forms could find home in such waste. One of them gets too close to the rear bumper. They follow in mindless pursuit of us as their prey. They thankfully relinquish the chase and leave us to continue fending off the others.

Where do they go during the day? We won't be around to see.

Kaya Simpson



Jungkook
Lan Truong
Graphite

Shnoo Smītek

Read this prayer for me – I don't write about Brown Joy enough. I'm tryna do that more thru poetry. Let me try God. Please. Let there be infinite amounts of joy to write about. Make it easier than writing about war, the impermanence of life, inconceivable pain, generational trauma, indignation, rage. Let's write about that too. But also, more so, joy. White supremacy works like that huh.

Feeds us our misery. Laugh. Loud. while we can

Dance.

Loud.

Dance Loud Lord Please.

'shnoo smītek?' I asked this poem and she hasn't told me yet.

I wrote you this poem

Before you go there
it's not for love
though I do love you
for existing
for showing up out of nowhere
feeding a gap in me that's been hungry she's been hungry
This isn't love (I don't think)

This is

This is something else
This is something like gratitude
looks like my mom's cooking
smells like marqa bijaj
smells like my aunt's suitcase when she visits
spilt emirati perfume rolls off of her clothes cumin
from the souk soaks our gifts
looks like your sun kissed skin I've seen on so many men before
when I get to visit in the summertime
because visiting is all I'll ever get to do
even if I moved there permanently branded american
my arabic sounds like I got halwa stuck in my teeth
I can't finish a sentence for you
but I can make chai
and you can sing
You sing to me
as we walk through sunny suburbia
and I smile at you stupidly
at a loss of how to tell you
what's happening for me

Something more than a fleeting summer love
This feels like something else
(though it might be that too)
It's

It's our perfect english and arabic dialects
its being raised by Black culture
it's about Falasteen coming up on the first night we drink together
and we drink alcohol
it's about Being muslim or not muslim at all
Or something else entirely

something in between

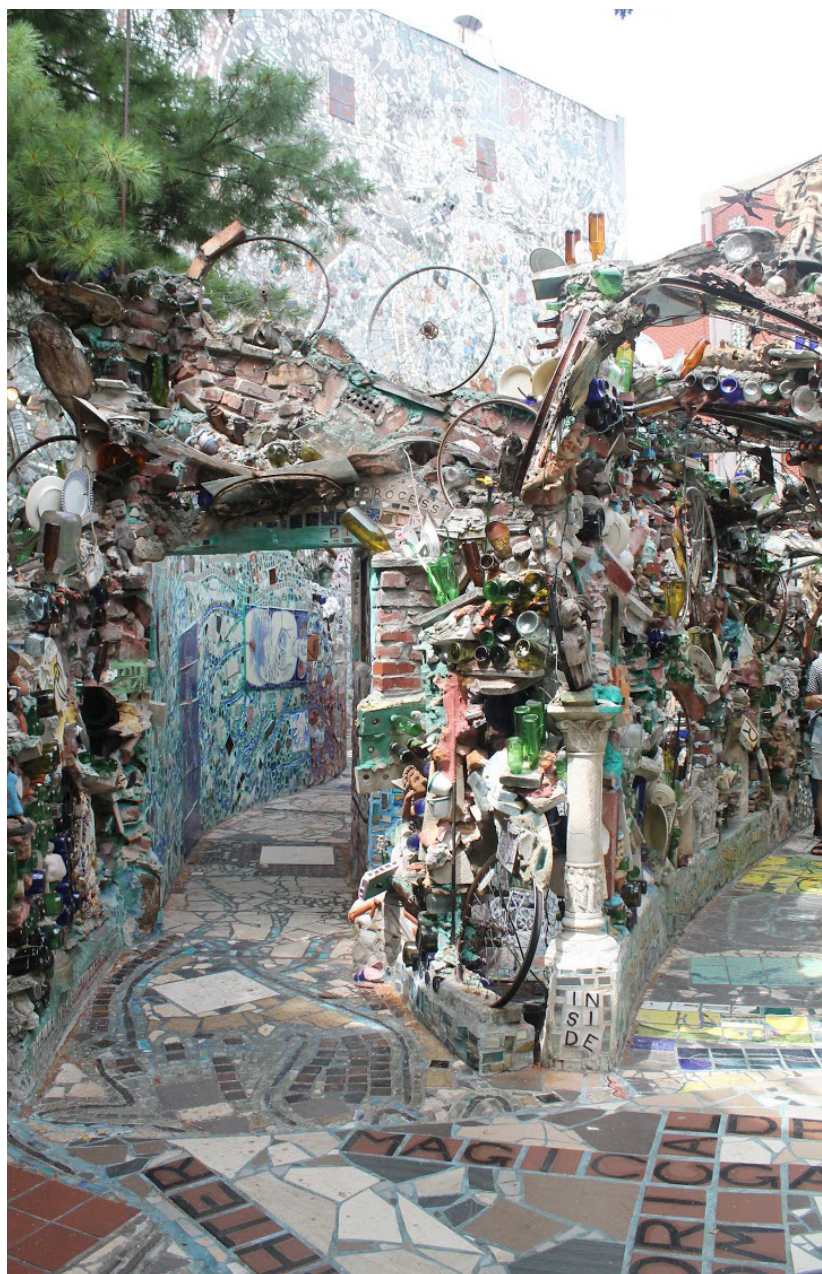
it's the space in between us on the couch
see I got this thing about arab boys
muslim or not
they remind me of my dad
and I thought I forgot
how he raised me what he taught
that we were born sinners habibtī
He breathes astaghfirullah as often as a cuss
(often)
But these days my chest is filled with

alhamdulillah and

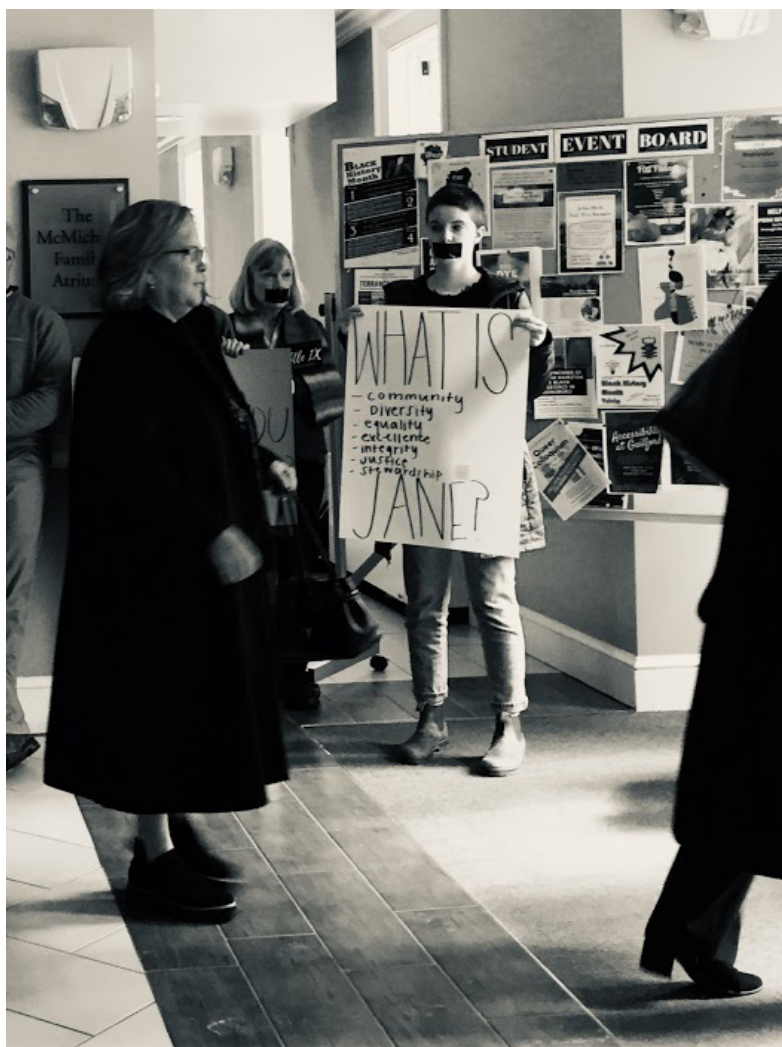
Each time we meet
the haram is shaken off my skin off my bones
to the music and dancing our friends
and cicadas and to the heavy hot summer nights
and unproductive weekends

shukrullāh.

Color me gold
Color me brilliant brown
Color me foolish
Catch my smiling in the office
unprompted
at the thought of you



Collateral Damage
Elanna Reber
Photograph



Untitled
arin
Photograph

Meet the Jorksons

Ep. 2: Pound for Pound

Scene One: Ext. Day. BECK, a woman in a sunflower-themed dress is watering the flowers in front of the house. There is a COMMOTION and the front door is jettisoned off its hinges into the empty street. Another Beck emerges. She is wearing a rose-themed dress and a white apron, her hair is messy and singed.

BECK: The pound cake is too dense.

The first Beck blinks slightly too slow. She pours out the remainder of the water and goes inside, leaving her future self on the front porch. Her duplicate sits down, dejected.

A door manifests partially underground near the porch. It THWUMPS twice as something on the other side tries to open it. There is a pause, then a new door appears, level with the ground. It swings open, and MISTER, a tall figure of indeterminate gender, emerges. They are likewise streaked with ash and soot. There is APPLAUSE.

Mister opens their mouth and the sound of A SINGLE SAW STROKE ON A PLANK OF LOCUST WOOD is heard. The one-liner is followed by a LAUGH TRACK.

BECK: Theoretically, but no. I never listen to myself.

Mister speaks again with two saw strokes, this time pulling a GRAPH from under their hat. Beck takes it.

BECK: That's not good.

The house explodes. (In a casual, well-rehearsed way.)

In the split second before the flames engulf the two Jorksons, Mister opens their mouth a third time and instead our view of the world glitches and pixelates, resolving to black.

Introductory credits are shown. Most of them are upside-down.

Int. (A large 19th century study. Three children are playing in the background.) NEW WEBSTER'S COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY, a large, nervous man in a tweed suit, is sitting at a DESK sorting PAPERS. He seems to be oblivious to the carpet fire that the children are attempting to extinguish in front of him.

NEW WEBSTER: Has anyone seen my spectacles?

The smallest child responds first.

UMBRELLA KID: Who do you think you are?

New Webster looks down to the desk immediately in front of him and picks up a pair of glasses.

NEW WEBSTER: Ah, yes.

He exits. ROBBIE, the most bendable child, throws himself onto the rug in an attempt to smother the fire. He is not successful. The third sibling, TECH, enters with a bucket and dowses the flames.

TECH: That was pointless. Can we do the desk next?

The LAUGH TRACK is played.

UMBRELLA KID: Where am I!

The LAUGH TRACK is played again, much too loud. The children set the model globe on fire as a second Tech, covered in minor burns, enters and stands in the doorway.

TECH (bored): Mom needs help.

There is a pause of several minutes. Tech and Tech stare at each other while the globe burns.

UMBRELLA KID: WHAT'S SLAPPING!

TECH: She made a cake that broke the Universe or something.

TECH: I'm guessing that's bad.

TECH: It's what you make of it.

The siblings follow Tech into the kitchen. There are no comical-ly-mistimed cartoon sound effects. An oven hums.

UMBRELLA KID: hhhheeeeeehnnhggngnhghiiiiihhhzhxjxhhha

The oven's song grows discordant. We can hear sharp breaths between each measure. Every time the oven draws a breath, a songbird dies from respiratory failure somewhere in Europe. There is no way to prove correlation, because no one will ever notice. The oven hums.

Future Beck runs in and throws an egg timer out the window. The timer rings, anyway, and the oven door drops open. The pound cake is too dense.

BECK: Well, shoot.

In the brief instance before the Universe collapses in on itself, the Jorksons are jettisoned into an emergency pocket dimension. Then the multiverse implodes around the cake, melting into a singularity of sugar, eggs, milk, and delicious, hot void. It is in fact "What you make of it."

The Jorksons tumble out into a damp cave made of green translucent rock, followed by a roaring BLAST of flame, which is cut off as Mister closes their sloppily manifested doors. A small audience APPLAUDS. The sound of the audience is much closer than it should be.

BECK: Where are we?

The cave is plainly a dentist's office waiting room. On the wall, there is a portrait of a single horse molar encased in beeswax. Floating above the painting is a phrase smudged in orange comic sans: "Tooth Dentist →" The horse molar portrait vibrates. It is angry.

TECH: Hey, look at that.

Tech points to a MYSTERIOUS ORB. The LAUGH TRACK is heard again, but it is not prerecorded. It is coming from just around the corner.

New Webster's Collegiate Dictionary enters the cave from just around the corner. He has seen something he was not supposed to see. He is holding an egg timer.

NEW WEBSTER: I found out where the laughter is coming from.

TECH: Can we do something about the Universe being broken?

TECH: Yeah, let's get a move on.

UMBRELLA KID: BOUNCE!

Mister CLAPS and the Jorksons are back in their regular living room, but all the furniture is upside-down. A BANNER unfurls that says, "Giant Invisible Spiders." The phrase is crossed out with pink sharpie and underneath is written "Maggot!"

BECK: BOUNCE!

There are 36 seconds on the egg timer.

ROBBIE: (Desperately) BOUNCE!

There are 9 seconds on the timer. The Pound Cake is almost ready.

TECH: Where's Bounce?

The doorbell rings. The family shares a moment of anticipatory silence as Tech walks over and opens the door. LILY, Tech's friend, enters. She is puzzled by the state of the furniture.

LILY: Hi everyone. (To Tech) Do you wanna hang out? My dad finally fixed the trampoline.

TECH: Oh sweet!

Bounce, a normal dog, enters the room. The remnants of a very dense pound cake coat where one would imagine its mouth might be.

LILY: Oh no, your dog ate your cake!

Bounce BARKS. Everyone laughs. The credits are written in Old Eastern Slavic and the outro plays in reverse.

THE END.

Tenoch A.
Tibaria Alnouri
Anonymous
arin
Leo Blain
Zach Bradley
Con
Meghan Curley
Stefany Florian
Tara Hall
Cary Hardwick
Alana Harrelson
Juliana Hubbard
Caleb Huppert
t.j.
Ainsley Kalb
Jordan Keller
Lolita Lupita
Mattie
Lydia Middlesworth

James Mitchell
Angela Nelson
Iris Newlin
Alys Parker
Joseph Patterson
Lahari Pokala
Elanna Reber
Harper Reese
Daniel de la Rosa
Bennico Salmanisto II
Tyler Sehnal
Kaya Simpson
Anna Snider
Lan Truong
Hazel Wechsler
Chloe Wells
Andrew Winter

& others

